

TISH HARRISON WARREN

10 New Year's Resolutions That Are Good for the Soul

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By Tish Harrison Warren
Opinion Writer

I accomplished zero percent of my New Year's resolutions last year. I'm obviously no sage of discipline. But I'd argue that the chief value of resolutions is not found in our success or failure at keeping them. Instead, they help us reflect on what our lives are like, what we would like them to be like and what practices might bridge the difference. There is goodness then in the very process of making resolutions. There is hope in the idea that we can change — that we can keep growing, learning and trying new things. This hope of renewal is the point of resolutions for me.

For 2022, I became curious about what resolutions I might adopt that would help my soul. The practice of spiritual resolutions is not new. In the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards, known for his fiery sermons and his mention in "Hamilton" as Aaron Burr's grandfather — the "fire and brimstone preacha (preacha, preacha)" — made a list of spiritual resolutions and reviewed them weekly.

They began, "Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions."

So with Edwards's caveat and prayer as my own, I asked for help in thinking about resolutions that would benefit our souls, as individuals, or that would help the "soul" of our nation and our world. I asked friends who are pastors, writers, scholars and spiritual leaders to offer suggested "reSOULutions" for 2022.

Here were some of the many responses I received:

Take time to reflect

"I took the advice to keep a pandemic journal (and it's now hundreds of handwritten pages), and it's the single best thing I've done over the last two years. I want to add to this daily journaling practice times of monthly/seasonal/annual reflection. This might simply be asking myself, as I look over my calendar, my projects lists, my daily journal: What's working? What's not? Why?"

— Jen Pollock Michel, author of "A Habit Called Faith" and "Surprised by Paradox"

Plant seeds of humility

"Make it a bimonthly goal to engage in a conversation with one who is not part of your political, religious or cultural community with the intention of learning something from them. Then, watch humility grow, which is a forgotten yet desperately needed virtue in our age of polarization and cancellation."

— Paul Lim, a historian of Christianity at Vanderbilt University

Care for the earth in small ways

"Find one or two small ways to care more faithfully for creation — between last January's winter storm and the hurricanes in November, climate change continues to disrupt and destroy lives. I want to love my neighbor by being conscious about my use and consumption of the planet. If everyone does something, those small things add up to big

things.”

— Kathryn Freeman, freelance writer and a co-host of the podcast “Melanated Faith”

Think about the third person

“Every time we act, our actions affect more people than we actually see. One of the hallmarks of Catholic social teaching is solidarity, recognizing that we are all connected as human beings and that our own well-being is tied up with the well-being of others. One small way to live that out is to pause before taking a particular action to think about the third person who will be affected by it.

“So, for instance, if you send an angry email to someone, you will be affected by it first, and the person you send it to will be affected by it second, but who will be next? That person’s spouse? Their child? What will that effect be? Is it worth it? If we all thought a little more about the third person, we would likely be more careful with how we treat each other.”

— The Rev. Jonathan Mitchican, Catholic priest and writer

Engage with the offscreen world first

“Every morning, wherever I am in the world, I go outside before I look at a screen. I’ve managed to do this consistently for about four years. Often I go outside just for a few moments. But as soon as I step outside, I not only find my senses coming alive, I also find myself feeling smaller — a creature in the midst of creation, rather than the god of a tiny glowing world.

“It’s been kind of ridiculously transformative — ridiculously, that is, given how simple this discipline is. I’ve found myself far more grateful, far less anxious and far less interested in whatever my screens have to tell me that day.

“Also, for the first time in my life, I consistently know the phase of the moon, which doesn’t seem like such a small thing.”

— Andy Crouch, author of “The Techwise Family”

Make a plan to seek racial justice and healing

“Write a racial justice action plan. The difference between a dream and a goal is a plan. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream that we love to reference, but what is our plan to achieve that dream? I’m sitting down with my whole family to make this plan using the “ARC of Racial Justice” as a model. We’re going to be intentional about building our *awareness*, forging *relationships* with a variety of people, and *committing* to working on a systemic level to fight racism. Defying the dehumanizing effects of racism is good for our neighbors and our own souls.”

— Jemar Tisby, historian and author of “The Color of Compromise” and “How to Fight Racism”

Take stock of your life every week

“John Newton, the 18th-century Anglican cleric and abolitionist, had a Saturday at 6 p.m. exercise to help him get ready for Sunday. I want to do something like it myself.

“It had three parts. The first part was to make two lists — all the mercies, blessings and good things to be thankful for that had happened to him that week. And second, a list of sins — of omission and commission — he had committed against others and God.

“The second part was to reflect on the discrepancy between God’s goodness to him and his behavior. This helped him get a refreshed joy in God’s free, undeserved grace. Of course this depended on his grasp of the gospel that we are saved by Jesus’ works, not ours. Without that, this discrepancy would drive you into the ground.

“The third part was a rededication of life, a refreshing and deepening of our commitment to God and God’s promises.”

— Tim Keller, pastor and theologian

Keep the Sabbath

“In 2020, I, like the rest of the world, was forced into rest. Everything shut down so in many ways, I didn’t have a choice. But then in the summer of 2021, many of the events and activities picked up. It felt like we were catching up on lost time and went full speed ahead. As a result, rest has been elusive. But this fast-paced, nonstop work and activity isn’t the way humans are made. I need rest — that’s how God created us. The Bible instructs us to rest and ultimately rest in Jesus. So, for 2022 I intend to keep the Sabbath. I’ll spend one day each week resting from all forms of work. It will be an act of worship and a declaration of my need for the Lord. Also, I need the rest.”

— Trillia Newbell, speaker and author of several books, including “God’s Very Good Idea”

Encourage the people around you

“My reSOULution is to look for an opportunity every day to give encouragement to someone in my path, whether that be a family member, a colleague, a cashier or a child. Giving encouragement benefits my well-being too.”

— Dorena Williamson, author of “ColorFull” and “The Celebration Place”

Pray for political leaders — especially ones you don’t like

“Think about our political leaders and pray for the ones you don’t like. But make them prayers of gratitude: for the things they do well, for the people whose lives they help improve, for the ways they contribute to human flourishing. And if you can’t come up with anything, ask yourself if it’s because they need to change or because you need to change.”

— John Inazu, professor of law and religion at Washington University in St. Louis and author of “Confident Pluralism”

I want to try something in this list that is hard for me and to try something that fills me with hope and possibility. As we begin 2022, these friends inspire me and dare me to believe that things can be made new — even me, even us.

Have feedback? Send a note to HarrisonWarren-newsletter@nytimes.com.

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